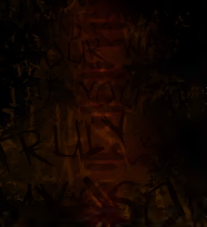


Chapter 15

Shadow of Thunder





mingle with the crowd?

But if we had to fight,
there'd be collateral.



Oop.

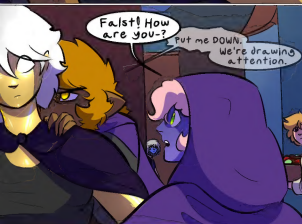


...put me down.

Sorry, little guy.
You're in no shape to
be running right now.

He's awake?

And cranky.



Falst! How
are you-?

Put me DOWN.
We're drawing
attention.



We need a crowd.

We're near the
north end of the
market-

Good.



If someone's hunting you,
they watch for how you move.
If you run, you're doing
half their work for them.

Until they find
us, we walk.





For the arena?



Yes, Trusk.

They're criminals.
It's where they go.



It'll be good
for them.
It was good
for us.



I will do this for
you, old friend.
But do not make light
of what we lived through.



Of what we would
condemn them to.



You have GOT to stop
sympathizing with these people.

They'll learn to deal
with it just like we did.



Come on. I'll show you
where the trail starts.







It gave me the Spark
I was missing, some pretty handy
lightning magic, and a million things
I'd rather be doing.

I said bye to Erin and
left the same night.

Bounced around the world for
a few years seeing the sights.



So why are you
looking for him now?
I'd think you'd want
to stay as far away
as possible.

Why would I
want to do that?

Sorry, did I mishear
the slavery thing?



Ah, man, you
sound just like him.
Erin didn't do anything wrong.
He was a fragile little kid. His dad
is the one to blame, and believe me,
I don't miss him one bit.

Erin just blames himself for
being powerless to fix it.



Powerless? Even as a kid,
I'd think the Elemental Magus
would have SOME options.



But he-



OH!
Okay.



What?

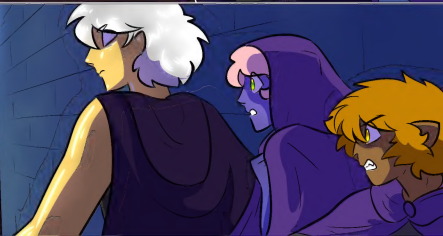
It's not important.
Anyway, it didn't really
matter what Erin physically
could or couldn't do.

It was his dad's
house, you know?
Even his mom couldn't do much more
than make me comfortable.

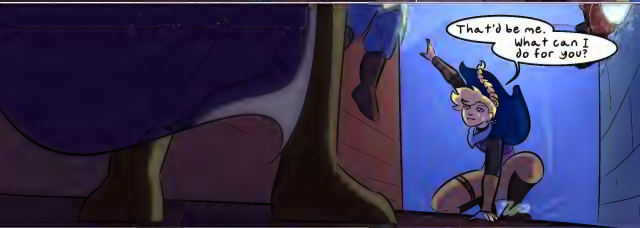


Kinda like this city.
You can be as strong as
you like, but all that matters
is who's in charge.











I am Erin Ruunaser,
designated ambassador
for Asera.

Your people have harried
and assaulted my entourage.



-And my sister.



This is an unacceptable
breach of interciry etiquette.

Hm. Maybe.



But your associates trespassed
on the Peak last night, and Zuurith
takes security very seriously.

Are you saying they were acting
on behalf of a foreign city?

That would be very serious.



I suggest you stand down before you
wear out your diplomatic goodwill.



Are you done pretending
this is about the law?



"Hunters," Please. You're glorified
slavers, and I know how you operate.
I claim sole responsibility for their
actions taken in Zuurith's domain.

Now either hold me accountable or admit
that this is nothing more than a transparent
abuse of what little power you have.

Well, Zuurith would agree you're responsible for their crimes.



But since the arenamaster hasn't figured that out yet, I'll still get paid.

Get them.



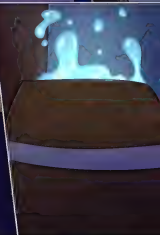
And you're too important to fall through the cracks, so the city will shake out the paperwork and let you off with a warning.

And the ignoble truth comes out.

Disappointing.



But not surprising.





It's just steam!
GO!



That should give them
time to reconsider.



Ahh, I've missed
that attitude.

We'll reminisce back at
the embassy. Move!



Hm.











Erin!

It's all right!

Although, for the record, THAT is why you always use a runic circle for casting.

Without control you're vulnerable to all kinds of environmental influences.

Okay, professor, keep it in the classroom.



And YOU thought I was being silly.

Mister bigshot elemental mage.

YES, congratulations, this is very, very bad.

You win.

I was right, wasn't I?



Wait, what's going on?

That storm brewing overhead is definitely a god, and a highly active one.

That backfire was the result of a clash of wills.

Its passive influence on the lightning collided with mine.

Yeah, it's been stinging all day. I can't believe nobody noticed.



I haven't been feeling anything.

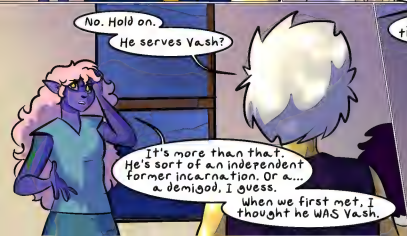
Because you're not the right kind of mage.
No offense.

So a storm god is sitting on a city none of us like.

Why are we worried about this again?

Storms are composed of wind, water and lightning.

There's no life in their domain.





Are you all right?

Of course.



You are not pursuing.

No, I'm not.

I think some of the boys are still looking, but they never could take a hint.



Vienne will be disappointed.

No more than usual. Come on, Trusk. You know what I'm about.

Arresting a foreign dignitary is just politics. It isn't any fun.

Not to mention there's no profit in it.



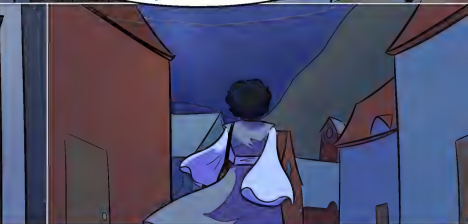
Some days this city makes me so tired.



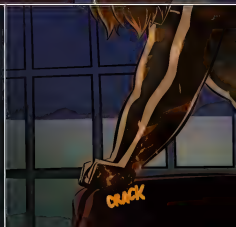
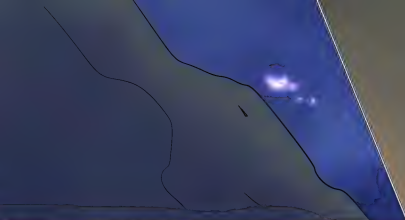
It is going to rain.

May I walk you home?











Back off! Away from the door!

A guard came for him hours ago. He hasn't come back. Did something happen to him?

That's none of your business!



Move!



Did I get him in trouble?



For crying out loud- He's Zuurith's guest. Stop antagonizing him.

The champion is fine, demigod. Probably better than fine.

He's being freed.



What? That's fantastic news!

I'd imagine so.

Please follow us, sir.



There's a few last-minute arrangements the Arenamaster asked us to do.





A spectacular-

I'm disappointed,
Zuvrith.

I hoped you were
better than this.

This is your domain, thus
I honor your dominion.
And THIS is how
you use that power?

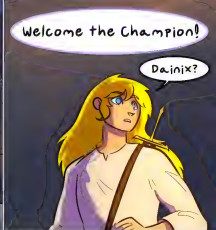
You set a poor example.

Er-

Continue.

What speaks so brashly is but
the pale shadow of a dead god.

It would do well to
remember its place.









You said you were
hunting the demon.



You were lying.



NO



I said



I needed
to kill it





So, I hate to say it, but I don't think your strongly worded bird worked.

What's plan B?



Plan B is making an enemy of an entire city. I really, really don't want to have to do plan B.

Well, you'd better think of something before she does.

At this rate she's gonna wear a hole in the rock.



I'll talk to her.

You two should focus on the storm.

If it comes to it, you're the only people here who can do anything about it.



Theoretically.

Hey, we've got a better chance than those two. There's nothing in a storm either of them can hit.

Yes, I seem to have a knack for putting them in impossible situations.



An entire city is in danger and you're making this about you?

I brought them here. I knew the dangers, and I promised I could keep them safe.



I failed, Tess. Every step of the way.

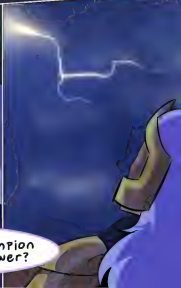
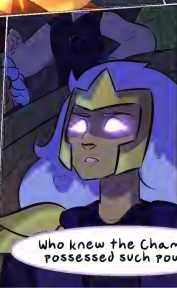
All the power in the world, and I still can't protect anyone.



We're going back for Kendal.











Disappointing.



You're really letting this fragile thing take that kind of tone with you?



Then again, he's not wrong.

You're a poor excuse for a guardian, Zuvrith.



Was I really that easily forgotten?



Tynan.



Forgive me for not greeting you earlier.

I'm afraid your little squall was not impressive enough to draw my attention.

Oh! Cheeky.

But I'm afraid you're all talk, as usual.



We both know YOU can't stop a storm.

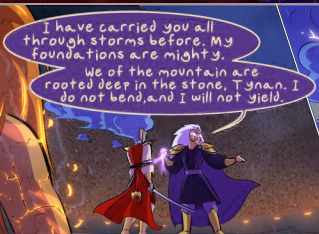
But why even bother to try?

You don't really care about these mortals. They're just fuel for your power, and now they'll be fuel for mine.

Think how much more orderly your city will be without any people.



I'd be doing you a favor, if you really think about it.





Next time, take
a cue from Vash.

Build it to last.

All right, everyone!

Feel free to panic now!



That's enough.

Ahh.



You know, I was really hoping you'd do that.



You're not Vash, of course. But I think you're going to help me with something I learned from him.

I'm not helping you with anything.

On the contrary.

You represent the last, shattered remnant of these people's only hope.



You're going to help me teach them a lesson.

